Rihanna, Accountability, & Survivor Subjectivity

"Where Them Bloggers At?" Reflections on Rihanna, Accountability, & Survivor Subjectivity
Alisa Bierria

Through objectification — the process by which people are dehumanized, made ghostlike, given the status of Other — an image created by the oppressor replaces the actual being. The actual being is then denied speech; denied self-definition, self-realization; and overarching all this, denied selfhood — which is after all the point of objectification.

– Michelle Cliff

Domestic violence, despite its brand, usually fails to constrain itself to a domestic sphere or a zone of privacy. Domestic violence spills over the boundaries of the abusive relationship itself, exposing the tenuousness of those boundaries, and implicating a public who share a knowing, witness the shadows, or sustain consequences from the violence. Being bound to a situation that they cannot control, others often attempt to manage the disquiet of domestic violence by crafting overly confident explanations about the relationship and investing in the comfort of a coherent narrative about something that defiantly resists coherence. People who share community with individuals within an abusive relationship tend to provide the most primary and impactful response. But they also frequently make evaluations and choices driven by their own biases, premises, and needs, which puts demands on how the person who is the principal target of violence and the person who executes a pattern of violence are defined and narrated. How can survivors of domestic violence lay claim to their own subjective accounts of their lives as they appeal to their communities for support and repair? How can a community who mobilizes for an intervention also create the kind of testimonial space needed for survivors to articulate complicated, messy, and contradictory descriptions of their experiences? Moreover, how are community-based accountability efforts imagined in scenarios with survivors who are vulnerable to being evaluated through a prism of historically rooted and institutionally reinforced discourses about the impossibility of their violability?[i] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn1)

Consider the fervent public response to the February 2009 news that Chris Brown brutally assaulted his girlfriend, Rihanna, and abandoned her in a car on the side of the road the night before their scheduled televised performance at the Grammy Awards. The event was quickly and extensively covered by online media sources who rushed to capitalize on what was seen as a scandal between two young, beautiful, black, and famous pop stars. However, the sensationalist media coverage had the accidental effect of creating an almost unprecedented opportunity for a broad-based, prolonged, and archived discussion about domestic violence.[ii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn2) As a regular reader of celebrity and political blogs, I followed these online discussions and watched with a particular interest in the kinds of actions discussants would suggest Chris Brown should take to account for the violence he apparently perpetrated. However, in the still ongoing online commentary and debate about Brown's and Rihanna's relationship, I have found that the focus stubbornly remains on Rihanna. Specifically, discussions seem fixated on the theme of *Rihanna's* accountability: What did she do to provoke Brown that night? What is she teaching girls about staying in abusive relationships? Why isn't she prosecuting her abusive boyfriend? How could she collaborate with a rapper who is known for explicitly misogynistic lyrics? What kind of treatment does she expect when she admits to enjoying BDSM? Feminist blogs, political blogs, and black and mainstream celebrity blogs placed demands on Rihanna to account for "her role" in what happened, "her responsibility" to young women, and "her respect" of herself as a (black) woman and a survivor of domestic violence. As Rihanna made her choices under the evaluative glare of the public and paparazzi, it became clear that the question of survivor accountability was by far a more compelling topic of online investigation than abuser accountability, and I suspect that this was mirrored offline as well.

What follows is a reflection on the ways in which Rihanna's experience of violence, her persona, and her choices were interpreted by others within the online arena of blogs and YouTube, and how the project of accountability was imagined and pursued by an online community of invested spectators. In an engagement with Rihanna's testimony from her November 2009 interview on 20/20, which circulated online[iii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn3), more casual commentary from her twitter account, and performative statements through her artistic choices for representing ideas about gendered violence, I explore her efforts to communicate her own narrative about her relationship with Brown and her views about accountability, and whether her attempt to transition from physical evidence *for* a discourse to active subject *within* the discourse was possible in the context of celebrity culture, popular media, and the dynamics of racism and sexism. My hope is that an examination of this unusually public exchange about domestic violence can help illuminate the expectations demanded of domestic violence survivors in the everyday, offline world.

It might be tempting to dismiss online reactions as a record of genuine public sentiment because of the notoriously provocative reputation of blog commenters and because these online exchanges were engaged by a broad public audience who were strangers to both Rihanna and Brown, certainly stretching what we usually imagine as "community." However, the particular character of the comments and commentary about Rihanna that I cite are consistent with the racial and sexual political histories and dynamics through which this discourse is galvanized. To write off people sharing their views in the blog comments section because they are stereotyped as anti-social or somehow more depraved creates a false sense of superiority for offline commentators, as if not expressing one's belief as frankly as she might if she were doing so anonymously online must mean that she does not also reason through the same embedded political frameworks.[iv] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn4) I contend that the public intuition about accountability demonstrated in many of these discourses is a rough reflection of the premises and logics that offline, more intimate communities sometimes employ in the process of demanding accountability in the context of gendered violence.

Black Women's Vulnerability & Violability

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm so hard
So hard, so hard, so hard, so hard.

– "Hard," performed by Rihanna

Two weeks after the Grammy's, TMZ, a popular celebrity blog with a knack for acquiring and posting online celebrities' private legal documents, published a close-up photo of Rihanna that revealed significant injuries to her face (TMZ, 2009). The photo was taken by the Los Angeles Police Department for the purpose of gathering evidence for the criminal prosecution of Brown, and two police officers were put on administrative leave while they were investigated for selling the photo to TMZ (Blankstein and Winston, 2009). A powerful visual representation of the level of injury that Rihanna sustained from Brown, the photo's web publication was widely shared and republished, escalating what was already an animated internet-based discourse about "what really happened." Judgments about the moral characters and possible motives of both Rihanna and Brown, and attitudes about domestic violence in general, quickly proliferated throughout a broad spectrum of blogs with diverse audiences and distinct missions.

When the physical evidence of Rihanna's face — wounded, exposed, eyes closed — was made widely accessible through relentless commercial transactions, insatiable celebrity consumption, and the mass availability of online media, it made what is usually imagined as a closed door event alarmingly public. A few days after the Grammy's, as speculations about Brown's assault of Rihanna advanced, Jay Smooth, the editor of the hip hop video blog, Ill Doctrine, posted (http://www.illdoctrine.com/2009/02/beyond_chris_brown_and_rihanna.html) a YouTube video of an interview he conducted with Elizabeth Mendez Berry, author of the 2005 Vibe Magazine article, "Love Hurts (http://www.thefreeradical.ca/Love_Hurts_VIBE.pdf)," about domestic violence in the hip hop community. Berry reflected on the reaction to the news of violence within Brown's and Rihanna's relationship, noting:

https://youtube.com/watch?v=FPlLdMTSIGg%26start%3D208%26end%3D239 (https://youtube.com/watch?v=FPlLdMTSIGg%26start%3D208%26end%3D239)

> What really saddened me was the degree to which, within hip hop, R&B, and the so-called urban community, there was a really strong backlash not against Chris Brown, but against Rihanna. The fact that we minimize this, the fact that we're so unwilling to accept the possibility that maybe she didn't deserve something like that — that's something that really struck me (Smooth, 2009).

Berry's assessment of the reaction was consistent with my own review of the comments section on black celebrity gossip blogs (The YBF, Bossip, and Urban Daily, among others) where a common response was the assertion that Rihanna must have provoked Brown—she *must* have hit him first—and women who hit men should not cry foul and should not be considered victims when they are hit back (Tami, 2009 (http://www.whattamisaid.com/2009/02/for-black-women-hatred-begins-at-home.html)). The assertion that she provoked him was not necessarily framed as an explicit pro-violence against women position; bloggers and their communities of commenters tried to rationalize what were sometimes vicious statements as really an issue of fairness, a problem of a double standard of expectations for women and men. Relying only on their speculations, a large number of commenters expressed a remarkable sense of certainty that the portrayal of Brown behaving violently without cause could not have represented the full or true story. Black celebrity blogs covered a statement (http://ncfm-activities.blogspot.com/2009/11/ncfm-news-release-calling-on-fair.html) released by "men's rights" organization, National Coalition for Men (NCFM), which suggested that Rihanna should "woman up" and admit that she assaulted Chris Brown first. [v] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn5) Also, commenters on these blogs who did condemn domestic violence seldom attacked Brown's character and sometimes expressed a hope that he would seek help. However, comments asserting that Rihanna deserved to be beaten were usually laced with contempt and hostility. In other words, not only was she "held accountable"[vi] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn6) for provoking the violence she endured, the potential for transformative possibility that Brown's critics often extended to him was not, conversely, proffered by critics of Rihanna. Instead, her failings were characterized as *intrinsic* to her disposition.

Perceived "innocence" and racialized sexism also helped drive this discursive pattern, with Brown's image amounting to an approachable black boy on the block who youthfully idled Michael Jackson and wore bow ties, contrasted with the "supposed victim," Rihanna, who was transitioning from a sweetheart image into a black woman performer who was increasingly forward with her sexuality. Perhaps most importantly was the fact that Rihanna hailed from Barbados, mapping the public consumption of her image onto a specific political trajectory of race, sexuality, and conquest. Patrice Elizabeth Grell Yursik, a Trinidadian editor of the black beauty and culture blog, Afrobella, examines (http://www.afrobella.com/2009/02/09/as-an-island-woman/) this aspect in the comment sections of celebrity blogs:

> Take a gander at any of the popular gossip blogs right now, and read those comments if you want to feel your blood pressure rise. I'm not about to link to any of the posts that REALLY got my goat, but I need to get this off my chest. As a proud Trinidadian woman, a West Indian woman, a woman from the islands… I do NOT appreciate the stereotypes that are being thrown around by commenters seeking to condone or explain this act of violence. I'm seeing all kinds of nonsense. And I quote:
>
> "He better watch himself, those island women are crazy."
>
> "Who didn't tell chris that island women were nutso?"
>
> "That island b***h probably put some roots on him.""Caribbean women are crazy, she probably cut him."
>
> "Chris Brown laying the SMACKDOWN on Carribean joints. [frank lucas voice]. My ni**a!"
>
> …
>
> Where do these kinds of twisted interpretations and stereotypes even begin?
>
> When did we get to this point, where we instantly blame the victim (Yursik, 2009 (http://www.afrobella.com/2009/02/09/as-an-island-woman/))?

Within the US, Afro-Caribbean women are constructed through a prism of violent ideologies rooted in historical processes of British colonial expansion and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and reinforced through contemporary US imperial interests and transnational tourist industries in the Caribbean and Latin America. Jacqui Alexander has argued that the sexual commodification of blackness drives the white-dominated Bahamas tourist industry, that in fact "white imperial tourism would not be complete without eroticized blackness. European fantasies of colonial conquest, the exotic, the erotic, the dark, the primitive, of danger, dread, and desire all converge here on virgin beaches and aquamarine waters, enabled by Black state managers and their white multinational counterparts. (Alexander, 1996)" Americans, in turn, consume these cultural scripts that define Afro-Caribbean women as "out of control," "crazy," and "dangerous," which manufacture justifications for racialized gendered violence and encourages patriarchal dominance over black women from the West Indies.[vii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn7) Black people in the US are not immune from colluding in these transnational dynamics of gendered violence — indeed, as we might infer from the last blog comment that Yursik cites, black American male camaraderie can be

forged through an affirmation of this violence. Though Rihanna's life occupies radically different material circumstances than the lives of most Afro-Caribbean immigrant women in the US, her resources did not prevent her public persona from being haunted by these archetypal stereotypes of "island women" which served as a paradigm for interpreting her experience of domestic violence.

In general terms, black women survivors of violence exist within a dominant conceptual space that make it difficult for them to easily occupy the status of "victim." Some of these reactions were described by many feminist bloggers as classic "victim blaming" which does not necessarily require a particular racialized context in order to proliferate. However, I believe that the pattern of insisting that Rihanna somehow caused this violence is consistent with how the vulnerability of black women is conceptualized in the US cultural imaginary. Accounts of black women who have been blamed and subsequently criminalized and pathologized for experiencing and/or resisting violence are numerous and diverse. Several high profile examples include Joan Little, who was prosecuted in 1975 for killing a prison guard who tried to rape her; the New Jersey 7, a group of black lesbians who were attacked in New York's West Village and prosecuted for defending themselves; Angel Rosenthal, a teen-age black girl in Seattle who was punched in the face by a police officer and subsequently pressured to apologize to him; and a Georgian woman named Janice Wells who was tasered by police officers because she did not give them the name of the person they believed perpetrated domestic violence against her. In these cases, all of which exist within complex circumstances and social conditions, black women were regarded as culpable instigators of their own violence rather than victims of gendered assault that deserved support and respect. Having access to resources that these other women did not have helped Rihanna navigate around the potential consequences of this level of censure. Still, this set of blog responses indicates that black women's vulnerability is a deeply *contested* space that creates a precarious tension in the process of parsing out what happened within an abusive relationship and who needs to be accountable for what. Thus, to characterize this dynamic as "victim-blaming," a practice that salvages a notion of "victim" even as it contends that the victim somehow helped enable the violence, misses a key point: when black women are victims of violence, they are not simply accused of bringing that violence onto themselves, they are dis-positioned as the *perpetrator* of the crime of violence.[viii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn8)

It is notable that the second major single from Rihanna's album, *Rated R* (which was released nine months after the night she was beaten by Brown), was "Hard" (Nash, 2009), a song that claims a space of feminine toughness in the face of media backlash in which others rejected the idea that she could be a "victim" of violence, suggesting an irony that black women would have to be *hard*, or impervious to others' attacks and devoted to one's self worth, in order to retain the resilience necessary to defend their own narratives of their victimization. Though "Hard" can be read as Rihanna's declaration of victory over some of these pervasive discourses, the song was also used as an opportunity by others to ridicule her for being victimized in the first place. For example, the top ten results in a Facebook search of "Rihanna Chris Brown" are nearly all pages that denigrate Rihanna, many of which specifically use "Hard" as a tool of ridicule and challenge to the idea of her vulnerability (Facebook, 2011). The second largest page, boasting over 40,000 non-anonymous "likes," is entitled "If Rihanna is so hard, why didn't she knock Chris Brown out? (Facebook, 2010)" It would seem that, when black women are violated, it is not only their experiences of violation, but also their testimonies of resilience and resistance to violence, which are vulnerable to a set of persistent politics that defines the instigation of violence through their actions. Black women's attempt to lay claim to subjective accounts of surviving violence are corrupted by this distorting pattern in which others can only see blame in the space of black women's experiences and articulations of their victimization, survival, and resilience.

Victim Blaming and Victim Displacing

We were criminals.
As we were burning,
The world called the police.

– "Fire Bomb," performed by Rihanna

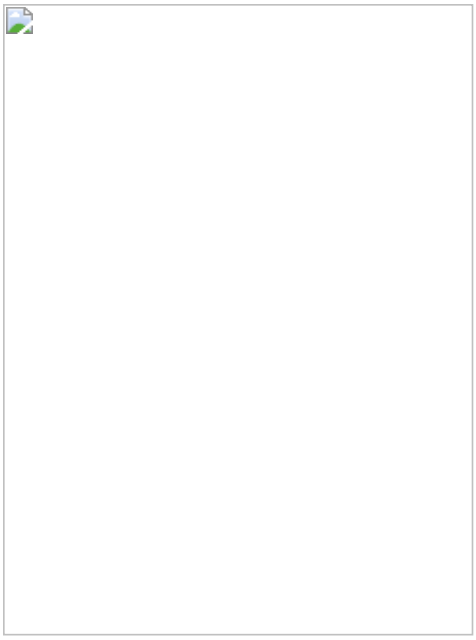
Some black and mainstream celebrity gossip bloggers showed more willingness to disparage Chris Brown in their coverage, while commenters on these blogs tended to register a mixed bag of opinions. Specifically, Cuban American blogger, Perez Hilton of PerezHilton.com, whose site hovers around the top of the list of high-traffic celebrity gossip blogs, amplified his condemnation of Brown by nicknaming him "Chris Beat-Her-Down" and referring to him as a "monster" (Hilton, 2009a (http://perezhilton.com/?p=46752&cp=6)). Hilton seemed to be employing these characterizations as a strategy to emphasize the need for the public to take the violence that Brown perpetrated seriously, but this kind of escalated characterization cannot

be severed from the dominant, violent, racialized narratives that define black masculinity through the tropes of aggression and sub-humanness. The choice to classify Brown as a "monster" creates an almost non-negotiable framework for Rihanna because the unspoken expectation is that people who are attacked by *monsters* should obviously pursue the most severe — even violent — punishment possible.[ix] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn9) If survivors fail to endorse this level of punishment, then they are taken to somehow be in collusion with the violence, and therefore are nearly as guilty as the perpetrator of violence. This logic puts Rihanna's persona in a bind: she either leaves the relationship, engages the criminal justice system, and fully participates in the state's prosecution of Brown, or others will presume that she implicitly endorses the violence that she experienced at his hands, making her no longer credible or deserving of support. This is not an unusual dynamic for survivors on the ground who are pressured into plans of action that stem from others' shock, anger, and anxiety about the lack of control they have over the situation, rather than the needs or priorities that survivors articulate. However, what is remarkable in Rihanna's case is that this common dynamic was open for public participation and public witness on a mass scale. When reports appeared suggesting that Rihanna reunited with Brown a few weeks after the assault, and that she was resisting cooperating with the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office in the prosecution of Brown, a second wave of backlash was initiated. Hilton protested,

> Okay, Rihanna, we really felt for you when this whole mess erupted.
>
> But you're sort of making it hard to continue to love you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
>
> First, we hear you're back together with your abuser, Chris Brown.
>
> Then, we hear you are recording a duet with Beat Her Down.
>
> And, now we're hearing that you don't want to speak in court if asked to testify.
>
> Ridiculous!
>
> Beat Her Down's lawyer, Mark Geragos, has requested a meeting with the judge in his assault case to discuss Rihanna's possible silence in the court room.
>
> Rihanna's attorney, Donald Etra, is in agreement with the request, both lawyers believing that Rihanna's position was compromised when her involvement in the case and other information leaked, and that she should no longer be subjected to public scrutiny.
>
> Oh come on, Rihanna!
>
> You're setting a bad example!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (Hilton, 2009b) (http://perezhilton.com/2009-03-13-rihanna-trying-to-get-out-of-testifying#.TpJobd6ImU8)

Hilton, Rihanna's most influential blog-based advocate, made it clear in this post and others that his support was predicated on a presumption that she would leave the relationship and engage the criminal justice system as a public demonstration of taking the situation seriously, which would apparently satisfy his interpretation of justice, but not necessarily hers. Other bloggers and commenters on celebrity gossip blogs likewise strongly advocated for Rihanna to participate in the prosecution of Brown.

The pressure for Rihanna to endorse the criminalization of Brown was defended not just as a call for justice, but as an act of public messaging against domestic violence that Rihanna, as a popular and young artist, could lead by example. The possibility of Rihanna's endorsement of Brown's prosecution was conflated with a public and official stand against domestic violence that could potentially influence other young women, so Rihanna was held publicly accountable for hesitating to contribute to the prosecution. Brown was prosecuted by the district attorney's office, and Rihanna did ultimately participate in that process, but we do not know why she chose to participate, how she navigated herself within the demands of prosecution, or if she still resisted to some extent. We do know that, after co-operating with the police, the confidential photo of her wounded face taken by police officers was sold to a gossip site and subsequently became "viral." Rihanna also indicated that the court mandated a protection order, forcing *her* to stay fifty yards away from Brown, which disrupted her professional work, creating, in her words, a "spectacle" (Brown, 2009 (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/22/AR2009062200452.html?wprss=rss_print/style); PopularMusicWorld, 2009c (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziShNfBtURo)). On the other hand, Brown successfully satisfied his sentence of community service and completed a 52-week domestic violence course, the certificate for which he shared publicly through his twitter account (Brown, 2010). Brown's completion of his court-mandated sentence was regarded by many commenters on a number of different styles of celebrity blogs that, again, he had taken his actions "seriously," that he officially accounted for his guilt, and the challenge for everyone else was to accept this state-sanctioned resolution of his acts of violence (i.e. The YBF, 2010 (http://theybf.com/2010/12/20/chris-brown-is-a-graduateof-domestic-violence-classes?page=3); Morrissey, 2010)



(http://jezebel.com/5715838/chris-brown-doesnt-regret-showing-off-domestic-violence-certificate). I am not suggesting that there should not be a possibility for Brown to publicly demonstrate regret for his actions and evidence of his transformation, but noting that, for these commenters, the most trusted source for gauging his seriousness about accountability was not Rihanna, but the state. Meanwhile, after being shamed and pressured into cooperating with the criminal justice system, the institution ended up *injuring* Rihanna, a fact which received very little notice and discussion on mainstream feminist and gossip blogs who covered other elements of the story. This is not surprising, as the public reliance on police, prosecution, and incarceration as the most legitimate infrastructure for accountability rarely accounts for the way in which these systems can stigmatize, or even *criminalize*, survivors of violence, depending on their access to resources and social capital.

Rihanna received the most intense online pushback for her apparent temporary decision to remain with Chris Brown less than a month after the night of Brown's assault (Leonard, 2009 (http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20262240,00.html)). Hortense Smith, a writer for feminist celebrity blog, Jezebel, recounted a sampling of the comments on the mainstream gossip blog, Oh No They Didn't:

> i probably won't ever look at them the same again now.
>
> at least rihanna's career had a chance, but that just flew out the window.
>
> fuck em both! he needs to hit her ass again! if she didnt learn the first time
>
> If this is true I'm not gonna feel sorry for her when he hits her again
>
> it's really upsetting to me how many people are blaming rihanna, calling her stupid etc. it's not as simple as getting up and leaving. there's a lot more to it than that.
>
> I'm sorry but I no longer feel sorry for her, because she's going right back to the person who put her in that situation
>
> I feel worse for her now. So many women don't have the strength to remove themselves from abusive situations. That makes me incredibly, incredibly sad (Smith, 2009 (http://jezebel.com/5162004/rihanna-and-chris-brown-what-happens-now)).

Smith characterizes these comments as "victim blaming," yet, though several of them disparage Rihanna for continuing her relationship with Brown, some of these sentiments do not blame her as much as they express a high level of personal frustration and hopelessness about her choice. A similar tension existed in black celebrity blog's Bossip coverage (which, prior to this post, published a fair amount of posts that criticized Brown). After accusing Rihanna of being "dumb" for returning to Brown and publishing a survey for others to weigh in on her decision where most votes went to the option that she was "a poor example of a young black woman, (Bossip Staff, 2009a (http://bossip.com/88405/was-rihanna-dumb-for-taking-breezy-back/))" Bossip editors endorsed Oprah Winfrey's public judgment:

> "Let me tell you why she got back with him, in my opinion," Winfrey said. "If you go back with a man who hits you, it is because you don't feel you're worthy of being with a man who won't."
>
> Winfrey said returning to an abusive relationship boils down to how the victim feels about herself. If you were raised right, she said, "and think you are a wonderful person, somebody hitting you is really offensive to you. (Bossip Staff, 2009b (http://bossip.com/91812/real-talk-from-oprah-to-rihanna/#more-91812))"

Again, while some of this discussion clearly takes pains to belittle Rihanna, it is also an appeal to a kind of black sexual politics of respectability (Higginbotham, 1993), revealing Winfrey's and others' anxieties about what Rihanna's choices communicate to others about black women and their worth.

The direction of this discussion was critiqued by some writers on feminist blogs (that I take to likely be white-dominated[x] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn10)) as "victim-blaming" because it burdens Rihanna with unfair expectations that she leave the relationship and, therefore, any discussion about why Rihanna would choose to remain with Brown should be shut down entirely. For example, in a post on Pandagon, feminist blogger Amanda Marcotte expressed frustration that the question is

asked at all, asserting, "A major reason men beat women is because we ask, 'Why doesn't she leave?'" as opposed to why does he beat her (Marcotte, 2009 (http://pandagon.net/index.php/site/comments/putting_yourself_in_someones_shoes))? Marcotte then conjectured some possible reasons why Rihanna might hesitate to leave the relationship, finally concluding, "… maybe she's really got one foot out the door. I hope so, for her sake."

Marcotte's management of the question, "Why Does Rihanna Stay?," revealed a struggle to position Rihanna in a way that is consistent with a desire for representations of appropriately surviving domestic violence. On one hand, the question inspires definitive judgment by Winfrey, Bossip, et al, and is leveraged to communicate a larger disciplining claim about black women and self-respect. The scorn in Bossip's language in particular suggests that there is no actual concern about Rihanna as an individual person, but instead reflects an agenda about how her choice to stay *looks* and what it *represents*. Characterizing Bossip editors' attitude as victim-blaming is imprecise because there is barely a victim present in the course of their accusations. Instead, the discussion is victim-*displacing*, disregarding any real acknowledgment of Rihanna's deliberation or recognition of her inner life, and instead foregrounding normative judgment about what she ought to do in order to satisfy their gendered expectation of what constitutes righting a wrong.

On the other hand, the question "Why Does Rihanna Stay?" raises red flags for Marcotte who somewhat discounts the question by arguing that it helps legitimize domestic violence. It is true that the perennial domestic violence question, "Why Do Women Stay?," is calcified with unspoken and unacknowledged premises that empowers domestic violence, as well as with elements of frustration, judgment, and despair, rather than genuine curiosity. I am also sympathetic to the view that, in part of because of sexism, the media's focus on Rihanna's choices greatly overwhelmed any sustained discussion about Brown's choices. However, discouraging rather than meaningfully engaging the question can enact a different kind of politics of respectability, as if asking a question about survivors' choices *necessarily* amounts to their culpability for the violence that they endured. In her post, Marcotte noted her visceral response to flinch when faced with the question, "Why Do Women Stay?" in part because, in order for us to engage the question without succumbing to victim-blaming, survivors would have to present as sympathetic as possible — for example, staying in the relationship out of some kind of resource-based desperation. However, while Marcotte recommends not pursuing the question of why Rihanna would stay with Brown because she does not believe that Rihanna will measure up to the suspect status of sympathetic survivor, she proceeds to suggest possible motives that *she* would take as reasonable for why Rihanna might stay, and, finally, she asserts at the end of her post that she hopes Rihanna has "one foot out the door." Though she advises her readers to not ask the question about why survivors stay, Marcotte proceeds to *answer the question anyway*, ultimately centering her own concerns and hopes rather than anything that has to do with Rihanna's actual needs, desires, or life. Perhaps without even realizing it, Marcotte constructs her own map of sympathetic-ness which includes the unexamined premise that Rihanna's departure from Brown would be the best thing for Rihanna in her mind.[xi] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn11)

Instead of boldly rejecting the conflation of choice and blame, Marcotte and others attempt to resolve the problem of victim-blaming by opposing the discussion about why some survivors remain in abusive relationships, while still victim-displacing Rihanna, the supposed subject of discourse, for their own expressed political principles, priorities, and trepidation. The consequence is that, by not intentionally exploring the question, we risk objectifying survivors by rendering invisible and unintelligible their choice-making inside of a known context of danger and within the contingent conditions of oppression. This is especially problematic given the conspicuous lack of race analysis in these blogs' coverage of Rihanna's situation, which obscures how anti-black racism creates a specific dimension of blame and contempt for black women survivors, making it even more difficult for them to disclose details about their agentic lives. While I agree that "Why Do Women Stay?" is a precarious preoccupation within debates about domestic violence, defensively stigmatizing the question ultimately dis-positions survivors' subjectivities and actions, leaving little room to be frank and public about the complexity of their choices and narratives.

Victim-displacing was also employed when several white feminist bloggers engaged in a cross-blog debate about the politics of women remaining in abusive relationships. Referencing reports that Rihanna resumed her relationship with Chris Brown, Linda Hirshman on the blog, Slate, challenged the notion that feminists should refrain from asking women why they remain in abusive relationships, suggesting that holding women responsible for their own well-being, and therefore accountable for remaining in abusive relationships, is a feminist practice that acknowledges their autonomy and capacity to reason (Hirshman, 2009a (http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/xxfactor_xxtra/2009/04/crazy_love_crazy_choices.html)).

Using her own experience as a survivor and testimonies from other survivors, feminist blogger hilzoy, responding from her political blog, Obsidian Wings, offered her own nuanced and interesting explanation about why women sometimes remain with people who abuse them (hilzoy, 2009a (http://obsidianwings.blogs.com/obsidian_wings/2009/04/why-do-they-stay.html)). Interestingly, Hirshman refused to engage hilzoy on her good faith effort to explore the question, choosing to instead entrench

in her position (Hirshman, 2009b (http://bbs.slate.com/blogs/blogs/xxfactor/archive/2009/04/14/sheltering-women-linda-hirshman-responds-to-hilzoy.aspx)). Hilzoy reflected that she doubted Hirshman was interested in thinking the question through "from the inside." She argued,

I do not think that [Hirshman] tried to understand what might lead people to stay in abusive relationships. … I think — and here I may be wrong — that Hirshman is more interested in using battered women to make a point about certain kinds of feminism than in battered women themselves (hilzoy, 2009b (http://obsidianwings.blogs.com/obsidian_wings/2009/04/battered-women-the-sequel.html)).

Hilzoy's observation that Hirshman did not seem particularly interested in engaging survivor testimonies, but would rather use the problem of "Why Do Women Stay?" as a convenient implement to prove a political position that she's already decided is true, resonates with my interpretation of the statements referenced earlier from Perez Hilton, Bossip, Winfrey, and the comments quoted from Oh No They Didn't. They express anger, disappointment, and anxiety about Rihanna's choices, escalating into a downpour of judgments and demands, while knowing very little about the details of her situation, though acting as if they do in part because of the false sense of intimacy created by celebrity culture. In these discussions, Rihanna is imagined less as a subject whose deliberations and actions should be thoughtfully engaged by commentators, and more as a conceptual placeholder, a symbol through which others define their own values, ideas, expectations, and hopes triggered by the undeniably unsettling fact of domestic violence. In these calls for "accountability" and action, Rihanna as a subject is displaced and replaced by a Rihanna avatar for the purposes of representing or exercising larger political and personal sentiments. Further, the ease in which Rihanna's subjectivity is subverted for others' goals is not unrelated to the racial and sexual politics of objectification. Reflecting on the commentary about Rihanna, fellow "island girl," Blackamazon, wrote on her blog, Having Read The Fine Print,

> That we had to be hypnotizing, or using the island hoodo to even have a man and thus it's inevitable that if anything happens to us, it's part of the flavor
>
> That it's completely acceptable to us that we would have to fight through life and even love
>
> and no one cares about the island girl but about what it means for everybody else.
>
> But island girls don't actually get to talk bout this.
>
> We just pay for it (Blackamazon, 2009 (http://guyaneseterror.blogspot.com/2009/02/sex-with-amazon-island-girl.html))

Though facets of her political status in the US facilitated the marginalization of her subjective responses and reactions to violence and enhanced others' projections of their own expectations in its place, Rihanna's situation remained unusual because she was positioned in the public sphere as a person of influence who could potentially communicate testimony about her experience as a survivor of domestic violence via her global access to news media, social media, and outlets for pop art expression. I will turn now to her testimony, exploring some conceptualizations of her own accountability given the circumstances of violence and celebrity.

Accountability, Community, and Contradiction

I just want to set you on fire
So I won't have to burn alone
Then you'll know where I'm coming from

– "Fire Bomb," performed by Rihanna

Alex Pates, 15, and Ansheera Ace Hilliard, 17, members of Chicago-based group, Females United for Action (FUFA) (http://femalesunited.wordpress.com/), published a nuanced analysis of the media coverage of domestic violence in the context of Rihanna's and Chris Brown's relationship on the Chicago Tribune online forum, "Exploring Race" (Pates and Hilliard, 2009 (http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/race/2009/02/beyond-chris-brown-and-rihanna.html)). Not much younger than then-21 year old Rihanna, Pates and Hilliard envisioned a more survivor-driven discourse than what they were seeing so far, writing,

> Every time there is a story like this we never hear anything from the survivor's point of view. We really want to know how this is affecting Rihanna. What is life like for her now? We feel like in situations like this the young woman of color is always left out and forgotten about and more likely than not the blame is put on her. She is put to the side and told to get on with her life. But that is not so simple.
>
> There are scars that will never heal and wounds that will never close. We will probably never even get to sympathize with her. We want there to be something out there that tells the story from the perspective of the survivor (Pates and Hilliard, 2009 (http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/race/2009/02/beyond-chris-brown-and-rihanna.html)).

The wait was over for those who were hungry for Rihanna's first-hand account of her experience with the advent of her November 2009 interview with Diane Sawyer on 20/20, re-published on YouTube on the user account, PopularMusicWorld (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjV8PWdZYR0&feature=related), among others.[xii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn12) Cool and mostly composed in a white dress that somehow conveyed both toughness through its sharp, geometric cut, and softness via downy fabric with fur accents, Rihanna not only reviewed details about her relationship with Brown, but also carefully reached for narratives that could sustain her complex views about her own sense of accountability. For example, she responded to Sawyer's question about whether she thought she would stay with Brown through a discussion about her responsibility to her young female fans.

> It was confusing for me. I was attached by love, but I wasn't thinking about the reality of the situation. I felt like, I built this empire, and the man that I love beat me, and because I'm going back, I'm going to lose it? No. And even *then*, you see, you start lying to yourself again. I felt nah, that's selfish, I can't think like that. That's selfish, what if I *am* supposed to help him? But when I realized that my selfish decision for love could result into some young girl gettin' killed I could not…I could not be easy with that part. I couldn't be held responsible for telling them go back. Even if Chris never hit me again, who's to say that their boyfriend won't? Who's to say that they won't kill these girls? These are *young* girls and I could not… I just didn't realize [her voice breaks a little] how much of an impact I had on these girls' lives until that happened. It was a wakeup call. It was a wakeup call for me big time (PopularMusicWorld, 2009b (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJgQ8aN1-pM&feature=related)).

In this passage, Rihanna seems to recount a process of discerning the most ethical course of action given the pressure of being in love with and abused by the same person. She says she tried to resist "selfishness," which led her to both *return* to Brown by rejecting the idea that her career should take precedence over his well-being (a source of worry for her given his emotional reaction to public judgment), and *leave* Brown by rejecting the idea that her love for him should take precedence over the potential impact her choices would have on young female fans. Though earlier in the interview, she clearly rejects any idea that she should be held responsible for Brown's violence, naming ignorance as the reason why anyone would insist as much, she nevertheless identifies a sense of obligation to others through her roles as (ex)girlfriend and superstar role model. Some liberal feminists might critique the idea that it took a concern about the safety of others, rather than herself, for Rihanna to decide that she ultimately could not remain in the relationship because it echoes patriarchy's acculturation of women to unreflexively de-prioritize their own needs and fail to be motivated by their own self-regard. While I would take issue with the idea that Rihanna should be held responsible for the abusive relationships of others, I contend that the dynamic between responsibility to her fans and transformative choice-making for her own life is an instructive process worth unpacking. In the context of her confusion about how to do the right thing given the tension of competing needs (including her own) in the disorienting context of domestic violence, the alarm Rihanna expresses about the impact of her choices on other women appears to operate as a *clarifying* opportunity, plainly spelling out the "the reality" of the situation in which she found herself. For example, in other parts of the interview, she seemed unsure about whether or not Brown would hit her again if she had returned for a longer period of time, or if it was even a fair evaluation to characterize other violent episodes as amounting to a pattern of abuse in their relationship, while also indicating that she struggled with self-deception about the nature of the relationship. However, she zeroes in on domestic violence's real potential for fatality when she brings her attention to the relationships of young survivors who follow her every move. Rihanna further uses her concern for other survivors as an enabling frame for understanding her own relationship in the following exchange:

> Sawyer: So many people said, she always seemed like the least likely person to be in a situation where that would happen. She always seemed strong…
>
> Rihanna: I *am* strong. This happened to *me*. I didn't cause this. I didn't do it. This happened to me and it can happen to anybody. And I'm *glad* it happened to me. Because now I can help young girls when they go through it. I'll say to any young girl who's going through domestic violence: don't react off of love. Eff love. Come out of the situation and look at it third person, for what it really is, and then make your decision. Because love is so blind. It's so blind (PopularMusicWorld, 2009c (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziShNfBtURo)).

Here, Rihanna not only articulates worry about other survivors, but *identifies* with them, asserting that she was vulnerable to domestic violence *despite* her lauded strength, indicating that she is not different than any other survivor. Her ability to establish both her strength and vulnerability — both global pop star exuding personal and sexual power *and* woman victimized by common gendered violence — facilitates an attitude of solidarity between Rihanna and other survivors, while simultaneously recognizing her particularly amplified position which can be leveraged as an opportunity to model a process of survival. Importantly, her model is not only for "young girls," but also for *herself*. Read together, these two quotes suggest that it is her regard for and identification with other survivors that enable her to conceptually "come out of the situation," and evaluate it from the "third person," which impacted her appraisal of her relationship with Brown. I read her as enacting a temporary and productive suspension of self-interest while she sorts out the emotional chaos caused by domestic violence, and employing empathy, community, and a robust sense of responsibility to others to do the labor of resolving ethical priorities and facilitating choices that seem right to her. I submit that this process is an important kind of "community accountability," in which Rihanna defines a community of survivors to which she belongs, and holds herself accountable to that community as a strategy to clarify and direct her choices in a context of loss and mayhem.

Other survivors are not the only group that helped drive Rihanna's choice to ultimately not return to Chris Brown. As Pates and Hilliard note, "The *LA Times* recently reported that Rihanna had the reputation of representing 'something very positive and in particular a strong female role model, and when she is associated with a situation like this it can have an impact.' They quoted a marketing executive as predicting that companies are likely to shun her in the future." The possible threat that her corporate sponsors would abandon her because remaining in the relationship with Brown would damage her public image, potentially impacting their profit margin, was rationalized by Rihanna in the 20/20 interview in the following exchange,

> Sawyer (in voice-over): Her corporate sponsors have been loyal amid speculation that they put pressure on her not to go back to an abuser.
>
> Rihanna: I don't know that for sure, but it's normal for a corporate company like that to be concerned about my decision. So after I start saying it's okay to get beat up and go back and who cares if you die… [shakes head] If I was a corporate company, I wouldn't want that either (PopularMusicWorld, 2009c (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziShNfBtURo)).

Indeed, it was reported that her endorsement contracts with Cover Girl, Gucci, and Gillette were in danger of not being renewed directly because she was reported to have reconciliated with Brown (Wheeler, 2009 (http://www.examiner.com/pop-media-in-national/rihanna-s-endorsements-reportedly-danger-gucci-ad-may-not-be-renewed-watch-video-documentary)). Rihanna's evaluation of the reaction of corporate sponsors who profit from a carefully constructed and marketed version of "Rihanna" can be read in numerous ways. Pates and Hilliard raise the important point that before Rihanna began releasing a stream of hit pop records, she built her early career primarily through endorsements, suggesting that, by allowing corporate sponsors to influence choices related to her intimate life, she is pragmatically protecting her own interests by safeguarding a sizeable source of income and core element of her pop stardom. However, in this exchange, she does not merely confirm that corporate sponsors have an interest in her choice, she affirms that they *should* and that pressuring her to leave Brown is not incommensurate with what she thinks would be reasonably expected from corporations.

Granting her point that conveying to the public that she does not regard her life as worthy of respect or care poses some problems, the pressure from corporate sponsors does not simply stem from an ethical concern about what her actions communicate to others, but what they communicate to their *customers*, who may react negatively towards their products (both "Rihanna" as product and, by extension, the products endorsed by her), ultimately undermining the profitability of both. Rihanna's stated receptiveness towards corporate pressure on her choices in her romantic relationship helps legitimize the privatization of survivorship in the context of its existence in public space, giving corporations the power to drive our conception of appropriate actions for domestic violence survivors.[xiii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn13) Importantly, the image of "survivor" that these corporations are willing to purchase and sell is not a survivor who would remain in the relationship, but one who would definitely *leave*, or at least perform "leaving," institutionally reinforcing the widely unexamined premise that leaving is the only respectable option that survivors could choose. I imagine that Rihanna's corporate sponsors also endorsed a performance of "seriousness about domestic violence" through backing her participation in the prosecution of Brown, again, reinforcing the normalization of the criminal justice response to domestic violence through profit-driven motives. By endorsing and financially rewarding only particular choices that they deem as most socially acceptable, and therefore more profitable, corporations help define and discipline the public imaginary about acceptable models of survivorship.

Though the idea that Rihanna's choices about her intimate life are beholden to corporations with whom she is contracted is troubling, it is hard to imagine how she could meaningfully challenge corporate manipulation while also protecting her career and her brand. Her reflection about this dynamic in the interview seems to try to reconcile her desire to defend her brand with her desire to do what she thinks is ethically right. Although nothing in the interviews I have reviewed suggest that, when she

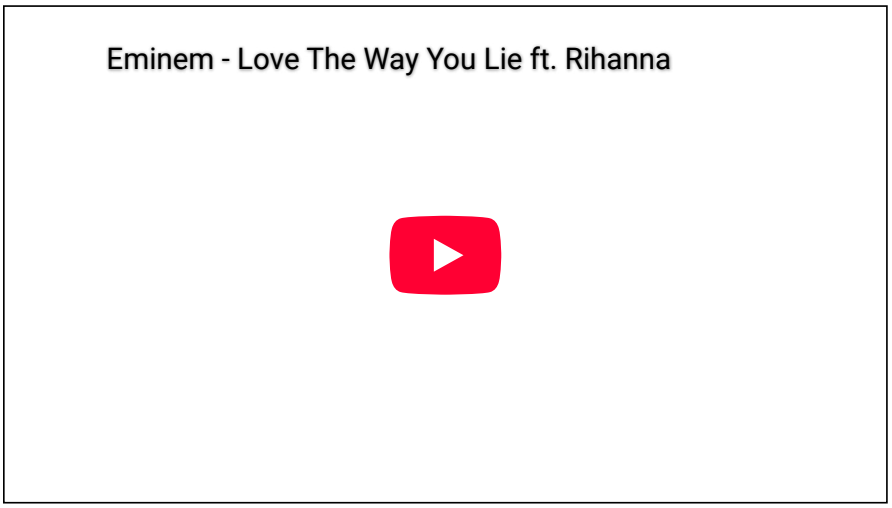
did temporarily resume her relationship with Brown, she literally thought that it was "okay to get beat up" and she did not "care if she died," she takes on the responsibility of this exaggerated imagined messaging, which creates a neat alignment between corporate demands and ethical conclusions about what ought to be done. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whose interest her choices ultimately reflect, which is not surprising because she seems to be trying to meet and manage the needs of both Rihanna as a subject and survivor and "Rihanna" as a corporate trademark, needs which may not always be reconcilable. This tension echoes the struggle of some survivors to attend to their own needs while also managing a kind of messaging to others about their situation, which can be driven by factors such as shame or a protection of some aspect of one's reputation.

(https://communityaccountability.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/russian.jpg)While Rihanna's interview responses were somewhat *prescriptive* as she explored what she owed to whom and why, her artistic responses have been more *descriptive*, as she leveraged a platform to create her own public commentary about the nuances of domestic and sexual violence. These commentaries had a tendency to unnerve liberal feminist and celebrity bloggers. For example, her first single from *Rated R*, "Russian Roulette" (Ne-Yo, 2009), which features an S&M-inspired cover photo of her wrapped in what looks like barbed wire, holding a chain, and sporting a modernized leather-looking eyepatch, includes the following lyrics,

> And you can see my heart beating
> You can see it through my chest
> And I'm terrified but I'm not leaving
> Know that I must pass this test
> So just pull the trigger

It is a striking description of what it might feel like when somebody participates in a relationship that could end their life and the terror of realizing that one is in over her head. It was panned by Perez Hilton for being "underwhelming," and criticized by Anna North on Jezebel for being "dangerous" and "creepy," both questioning whether it was a wise "comeback" single (Hilton, 2009c (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziShNfBtURo); North, 2009a (http://jezebel.com/5385977/does-rihannas-new-single-defend-abusive-relationships)). North found the song upsetting, and though she tried to make room for the idea that the song was a description of an experience, she ultimately felt the need to question if the choice to produce the song had anything to do with Rihanna, as if the lack of consistency between "Russian Roulette" and the kind of song North would imagine a survivor of domestic violence releasing can only be explained by the possibility that Rihanna is not in control.

A longer version of this kind of discursive tension unfolded in the reaction to the song and video, "Love the Way You Lie" (LWYL), Rihanna's collaboration with rapper, Eminem (Mathers, et al, 2010).



Actor Dominic Monaghan who was featured in the video described the song as "essentially a look at the relationship that Eminem was in with his wife, Kim (Kaufman, 2010 (http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1645202/eminem-kims-rocky-past-inspired-love-way-lie-video.jhtml))," referring to reports that Eminem battered his former wife, Kimberley Anne Scott, when they were together. Eminem's notoriously graphic descriptions of violence against women in his songs have been widely acknowledged, critiqued, and defended over the course of his career, and Rihanna's collaboration with him after her ordeal with Brown was perceived as provocative. Still, she described the opportunity to collaborate on the song as something she "needed" to do, remarking,

> It's something that, you know, [Eminem and I have] both experienced, you know, on different sides, different ends of the table. … It just was authentic. It was real. It was believable for us to do a record like that, but it was also something that needed to be done, and the way he did it was so clever. He pretty much just broke down the cycle of domestic violence, and it's something that a lot of people don't have a lot of insight on, so this song is a really, really powerful song, and it touches a lot of people (Kaufman, 2010 (http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1645202/eminem-kims-rocky-past-inspired-love-way-lie-video.jhtml)).

Rihanna (presumably) performs the role of the character who is a target of violence within the abusive relationship described in the song, and sings the chorus:

> Just gonna stand there and watch me burn
> Well that's alright because I like the way it hurts
> Just gonna stand there and watch me cry
> Well that's alright because I love the way you lie
> I love the way you lie (Mathers, et al, 2010)

Eminem's verses are complicated, expressing an account of his emotional state when he engages in violence as well as self doubt, regret, frustration, desire, and an overall critique of the relationship discussed in the song. The song was commercially successful, but the sentiment that Rihanna's character would "like" the way the violence hurts and "love" the way the abuser lies to her disappointed many feminists who hoped for a more definitive repudiation of domestic violence from her. However, it was the video that received the most backlash from feminist bloggers who criticized it for glamorizing domestic violence by casting Megan Fox, an actor known for her sex appeal, and by portraying sexual tension in the relationship between the video's protagonists (e.g., Clark-Flory, 2010 (http://www.salon.com/2010/08/06/megan_fox_eminem_rihanna/)).

Yet, the video resonated with some survivors who noted, while not conceding the idea that Fox's character would deserve to be beaten, her portrayal of fighting back is an important representation of "domestic violence" that is rarely explored by anti-violence feminists. Anticipating that many feminists would not treat the song and video with a careful analysis that she thought they demanded, working class Chicana blogger, brownfemipower, wrote on her blog, flipfloppingjoy,

> I hope that teh[xiv] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn14) feminists slow down and really think through how they interpret this video and what sort of a reception they give to it. For everything that is deeply fucked up about Eminem–this is still one of the more realistic interpretations of violence in the home I have seen. I don't even know if I can call it domestic violence. At least not how mainstream feminist/antiDV groups have defined domestic violence. This is the sort of fighting most women I knew (including myself) were a part of. The women I knew, including myself, explicitly refused "domestic violence" or didn't recognize what they were living in as domestic violence–because they fought back. Because they egged on and got some really good hits in. They didn't think they deserved the violence, they didn't think they were victims–they didn't sit on the stairs and cry with the swollen lip like in the public service announcements. They fought back. Or even started it. So it wasn't domestic violence. Or, it wasn't what they'd been *told* was domestic violence. …
>
> …so many women I know (probably most) will see themselves in this video. See the violence they lived through in this video (brownfemipower, 2010 (http://flipfloppingjoy.com/2010/08/06/eminemrihanna/)).[xv] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_edn15)

Targeting the way in which the video subverts what we have been trained to imagine as authentic "domestic violence," brownfemipower challenges what we imagine authentic survivors *doing* while in the relationship, recasting "fighting back" and "egging on" while staying in the relationship as one genuine and interesting narrative of survival. She received some strong pushback from feminist bloggers for this post, revealing a tension in our collective understanding about what kind of survivor actions are acceptable to explore in public discourse. Specifically, can we make room to consider scenarios in which survivors of domestic violence do not necessarily reject violence, whether that violence is employed by their partner or by themselves, while still recognizing domestic violence as one defining aspect of the relationship? This is a complex topic to which I cannot do justice in this essay, however I can imagine several issues for further exploration. Rihanna sings "I like the way it hurts," which could mean any number of things from finding something valuable in non-consensual physical violence (for example, the chance to hurt the person who sustains the cycle of violence) to pursuing consensual BDSM as a way to safely explore power and physical stimulation. (BDSM is particularly interesting in the context of Rihanna, who freely admits enjoying power and pain play in her sex life (Rolling Stone, 2011), which has motivated others to question the authenticity of her claim to survivorhood.) Survivors' use of violence is also complicated in the context of accountability. Connie Burk at the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse (http://nwnetwork.org/) in Seattle has advocated for thoughtfully crafting a conceptual space that can support survivors who have used violence and who want to account for

those actions instead of relying on the dichotomous poles of either discounting the fraught and charged context in which survivors enact violence on others, or insisting that, because of the political and material context of domestic violence, survivors' desire to account for violence they enacted is somehow wrong-headed. Sanitizing the concept of survivorship from survivors' complex engagements with violence not only marginalizes some survivors, it forces them into frameworks designed by a domestic violence politics of respectability, ultimately displacing survivors and their testimonies.

Interestingly, though Eminem's work has received mainstream and feminist critique, he is usually criticized for offensive lyrics, not for promoting inauthentic or imprudent representations of himself and his experiences. Eminem — white, once working class, and one of the most popular rap stars in the world — is afforded the privilege of artistic distance, meaning his lyrics are defended as a creative description of an emotional experience, not a literal endorsement of violent actions discussed in his music. Rihanna, however, is rarely afforded this privilege. As a domestic violence survivor, and as a black woman, she tends to be consumed as *evidence* of a discourse rather than a credible artistic commentator who articulates political and aesthetic views about the problem of violence.

(https://communityaccountability.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/rihanna_man_down.jpg)In 2011, Rihanna released a video for her single, "Man Down (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEhy-RXkNo0)," in which she portrays the role of a woman who is raped, who murders her perpetrator in revenge, and who subsequently expresses regret about taking the life of "somebody's son" and panic about having to leave home to escape state prosecution. The video's representation of fatal vengeance transgresses survivor politics of respectability and the fact that a black Caribbean woman is the agent behind this "bad survivor" action is particularly subversive. In response, Paul Porter, acting as a representative for the Parent Television Council, invoked Chris Brown in his case for why "Man Down" should not be aired, arguing,

> Man Down' is an inexcusable, shock-only, shoot-and-kill theme song. In my 30 years of viewing BET, I have never witnessed such a cold, calculated execution of murder in primetime. Viacom's standards and practices department has reached another new low. If Chris Brown shot a woman in his new video and BET premiered it, the world would stop. Rihanna should not get a pass and BET should know better. The video is far from broadcast worthy (Nuñez, 2011 (http://nunezdaughter.wordpress.com/2011/06/09/in-the-future-we-kill-our-attackers-rihannas-man-down-as-afrofuturistic-text/)).

Here, Porter does not merely condemn the evocative imagery in the video, but disciplines Rihanna as a domestic violence survivor, citing the hypothetical censure of Chris Brown as an argument for why Rihanna should not "get a pass" for how she represents narratives about violence against women *in general*. Porter leverages Rihanna's identity as a survivor as a reason why BET should censor her artistic representations of a survivor's response to sexual violence.. Again, Rihanna's aesthetic and political interpretations of gendered violence trouble and push the boundaries of "appropriate" survivorship, prompting backlash from both feminists and anti-feminists that are wound with their frustrations about her own refusal to stay within those boundaries as a survivor herself. Despite some public pressure, Rihanna did not pull the video from the air, publicly responding (http://twitter.com/#!/rihanna/status/76330693042520064) on Twitter, "I'm a 23 year old rockstar with NO KIDS! What's up with everybody wantin me to be a parent? I'm just a girl, I can only be your/our voice! (Rihanna, 2011)" Her response reinforced the discussion about her relation to young fans in her 20/20 interview by carefully defining her work away from the position of parental prescription, and instead aligning herself with a community of young women survivors attempting to articulate the complex moral truths about their experiences of violence.

"She exists against an image, which exists in another mind." This is how Jamaican American theorist, Michelle Cliff, in her landmark essay, "Object into Subject: Some Thoughts on the Work of Black Women's Artists," describes the subverted "Aunt Jemima" as created by Betye Saar in her artistic reconstruction, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*. The description resonates with Rihanna's attempts to boldly affirm a more expansive, complicated, often rule-breaking portrait of survivor subjectivity, agency, and accountability, doing so in the face of relentless efforts to subject her persona to a pattern of objectification, displacement, and distortion. Objectification not only denies others selfhood, but as Cliff argues, it *manages* the process of deliberation, making others certain about the reasonableness and accuracy of their conclusions. She writes, "It is objectification that gives the impression of sanity to the process of oppression." The question is, how can the public, particularly those who are in shared community with survivors of violence, disrupt this "sanity" in order to receive a more spacious and messier account of survivorhood that incorporates survivors' complex and multifaceted truths? We must learn how to develop community-based responses that are dynamic and flexible enough to adapt to the charged politics of survivors' choices, without forcibly molding them to fit simplistic narratives that are more politically convenient or emotionally reassuring for others. This is not a suggestion to uncritically idealize survivor testimonies or to fail to consider other people's narratives and accounts about abusive relationships. I am proposing, however, a critical mindfulness about the treatment of survivor

testimonies and the pressure put on them to satisfy expectations that others may not even know they are harboring. It requires an openness to complexity and contradiction, something that is not easy to sustain in the context of crisis-based responses that domestic violence can trigger. However, a practice of reflexiveness and a commitment to the recognition of the subjectivity of survivors can help map pathways to getting there.

—

* This article was originally published in *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict & World Order*, Vol 37, No. 4 (2011-2012), Special Issue: *Community Accountability: Emerging Movements to Transform Violence. (*Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo, Alisa Bierria, Mimi Kim, eds.) I am indebted to the rich feedback and critical key insights provided by my brilliant compañeras and co-editors, Mimi Kim and Clarissa Rojas, whose support and tenacious commitment to this essay ultimately sparked it into existence, and my wonderfully sharp and supportive friends, Jakeya Caruthers, Xandra Ibarra, Nick Mitchell, and Emily Thuma, whose love for and commitment to the liberatory potential of pop culture inspire me and give me hope.

---

[i] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref1) For definitions and discussions about concepts and politics of "community accountability," refer to (INCITE!, 2003), (INCITE!, 2005), (Bierria, et al, 2006), (Chin, et al, 2011), and (Rojas, et al, 2011).

[ii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref2) There have been other instances of wide media coverage of domestic and sexual violence, but none quite like the media response to Rihanna and Chris Brown. The 1994 murder of Nicole Simpson (and her companion, Ronald Goldman) and the ensuing trial of her accused husband, football star OJ Simpson, reached epic levels of racialized spectacle in the media, but, in part because Nicole Simpson was not alive when the event reached the media, the center of public discussion did not focus on domestic violence itself, but instead landed on the politics of prosecuting OJ Simpson. Rock star Tina Turner survived her widely known ordeal with her abusive husband, Ike Turner, but the fact of domestic violence didn't reach the media through a single climactic event, and slowly unfolded in public consciousness through Turner's song choices, her autobiography, *I, Tina* (Turner and Loder, 1987), and the ensuing 1993 film, *What's Love Got To Do With It*. Instead of instant public debate, Turner's experience was regularly acknowledged by people over the course of years, sometimes used casually as a meme for domestic violence (see, for example, Alicia Keys' lyric in her 2005 song, "Unbreakable": "We could fight like Ike and Tina…"). I would argue that the closest recent corollary is the massive coverage and public debate surrounding Prof. Anita Hill's description of the sexual harassment she experience by Clarence Thomas while employed at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Thomas's 1991 Supreme Court confirmation hearings served as a widely-covered (and deeply problematic) platform for Hill to testify about her ordeal, and for Thomas to subsequently attempt to discredit Hill. The testimonies sparked a fierce public debate about the motives and credibility of both parties (with particular viciousness reserved for Hill), and revealed important information about how sexual harassment accusations (among other issues) could be digested and repackaged by the media . Some of the public discourse was communicated through media outlets such as op-ed articles, television interviews, conferences, and published writing such as the superb collection, *Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*, edited by Toni Morrison (1992). However, these media sources almost exclusively featured academics, journalists, and other "expert commentators," predating the 21st century era of mass social media platforms such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc, which provide a stage for a much wider swath of public and published discussion. It is this more broadly interactive stage where most of the discourse on Rihanna and Brown resides, making it a unique opportunity to review thousands of archived reactions to the news about their relationship. On a different note, it is significant that the most famous recent examples of intimate violence that have become widely scandalized by the media feature black people — as perpetrator and/or victim of violence — as central accomplices in the narrative, raising the question about how the elements of blackness, anti-black racism, gendered violence, and celebrity, stimulate media spectacle of violence.

[iii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref3) 20/20 is a "television newsmagazine" that airs on ABC, but I am specifically referring to its republishing on YouTube, which made it more accessible for wide review and enabled others to publicly respond and repost the interview in other online locations.

[iv] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref4) The October 1, 2011 episode of Saturday Night Live featured a skit, "The Comments Section," in which three internet commenters were invited to a show to discuss their boorish comments, which were egregiously racist, sexist, and mean, and then subsequently punched in the stomach as the audience laughed and cheered (Michaels, 2011). The

skit is an unwittingly good representation of the way in which the views of blog commenters are dismissed as vulgar outliers whose comments are in no way related to the attitudes of what is taken as refined civil society, facilitating a sense of superiority for, and giving cover to, everyone else.
[v] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref5) NCFM referenced a link on a television news blog as evidence, which in turn references TMZ, but TMZ only cites "sources" to back up this claim (National, 2009).

[vi] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref6) The concept of "holding accountable" is tricky to write about because one person's "holding accountable" is another person's "persecuting." In fact, there seemed to be at least three rough categories that I could discern in these commentaries: some attacked Rihanna merely for the sake of attacking her; some seemed to offer a genuine, good faith attempt to sort out if and what Rihanna needed to account for (setting aside, for now, if I agree with that evaluation); and some occupied a complicated middle ground that read to me like persecution of Rihanna, but also seemed to do so in the name of some conception of justice, however problematic. I would put the NCFM statement in the latter category. That said, I use the phrase "held accountable" here not because I think these statements represent useful examples of "holding someone accountable," but because this is what I take the commenters to understand themselves doing.

[vii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref7) Another public example that exercised similar dynamics was the way in which the credibility and dignity of Nafissatou Diallo, a Guinean maid working at a New York hotel, was thoroughly undermined by the press when she accused Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the French head of the International Monetary Fund, of sexually assaulting her in his hotel room. The distorted coverage ultimately compelled Diallo to not only pursue criminal prosecution against Strauss-Kahn, but also defend herself from public denigration by suing the New York Post for defamation (Rushe, 2011).

[viii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref8) See Beth Richie's *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered, Black Women* for a rich and critical examination of the specific ways in which black women are criminalized as a consequence of acting in response to domestic violence.

[ix] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref9) Hilton's discursive choices echo a legacy of "monstering" black men in the context of racialized discourse about sexual violence, which includes post-Reconstruction white supremacists who wielded this potent strategy by fabricating claims of sexual assault of white women by black men, and then using those claims to justify lynching thousands of black men. Again, one might dismiss Hilton's choice of language because of his reputation as a blogger who can be obnoxious, but to read his characterizations as simply a consequence of his writing style or personality rather than also a consequence of being embedded within a historical trajectory in which we all inhabit, lets the rest of us off the hook much too easily.

[x] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref10) It's important to note that I assume that many of the feminist blogs I reference — specifically, Jezebel, Feministe, and Pandagon — are probably white-dominated unless I intentionally describe it otherwise. It is difficult to know for sure, of course, because blogs don't always include contributor bios and, when they do, white bloggers rarely identify as "white." However, I have found that bloggers who are women of color tend to racially self-identify and this racial identification is often indicative in the blog's style and content.

[xi] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref11) I understand the instinctive impulse to want Rihanna to leave, especially considering the level of the egregiousness of Brown's violence that night. Still, treating "leaving" as if it were an unyielding ideology — a moralistic mandate rather than a survivor-driven outcome — that should be *universally* applied to all survivors can obscure survivors' experiences and their efforts at harm reduction and pragmatic resistance, discount their deliberation about their own ethical and material priorities, wrongly presume that domestic violence is the worst and most urgent violence that the survivor faces in her or his life, and foreclose any possible imagined future of robust and transformational accounting and repair from the perpetrator of violence. Further, in the context of US law and order culture and anti-black racism, moralistic mandates often amount to pathologizing or criminalizing survivors. "Leaving" as an ideology also prioritizes an individual-based over a community-based notion of intervention, placing a larger burden on survivors to make right a phenomenon that is buttressed

by cultural and institutional forces. Maintaining that the profound injury caused by domestic violence should never be rationalized or underestimated, how can we trouble and complicate our overly certain working assumptions about what survivors ought to do?

[xii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref12) Disappointingly, despite their earlier coverage discussing the representation of and reports about Rihanna and her choices, Rihanna's interview did not receive much engaged coverage from mainstream feminist blogs, including Feministe, Pandagon, and another high-traffic feminist blog, Feministing. One exception is Anna North on Jezebel who published two posts discussing the embedded Youtube videos of the 20/20 interview (North, 2009b and 2009c). Notably, most of North's reaction to the testimony in these posts was to critique and correct Rihanna's description of her relationship with Brown and her ideas about accountability.

[xiii] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref13) Many thanks to Mimi Kim and Clarissa Rojas for helping to articulate the language to describe this particular dynamic.

[xiv] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref14) I have never seen this explicitly explained, but I think one blogger usage of writing "teh" as an intentional misspelling of the word "the" is to parody misspellings that occur when bloggers and commenters write quickly and carelessly in the context of frenzy.

[xv] (/Users/foxybrown/Documents/Writings/SJJ%20Community%20Acc%20Issue/Rihanna/Where%20Them%20Bloggers%20At-SJJprefinal.docx#_ednref15)

REFERENCES

Alexander, Jacqui
1996 "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of Feminist and State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy." *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. Ed. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty. NY: Routledge. p. 96.

Berry, Elizabeth Mendez
2005 "Love Hurts." *Vibe*. (March): 162-168.

Bierria, Alisa, Onion Carrillo, Eboni Colbert, Xandra Ibarra, Theryn Kigvamasud'Vashti, Shale Maulana
2006 "Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies." *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*. Boston: South End Press.

Blackamazon
2009 "Sex With The Amazon: Island Girl." *Having Read The Fine Print*…… (February 11: http://guyaneseterror.blogspot.com/2009/02/sex-with-amazon-island-girl.html (http://guyaneseterror.blogspot.com/2009/02/sex-with-amazon-island-girl.html)).

Blankstein, Andrew and Richard Winton
2009 "2 LAPD officers placed on leave amid probe into leak of Rihanna photo." *Los Angeles Times.* (September 11; http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2009/09/2-lapd-officers-place-on-leave-amid-probe-into-leak-of-rihanna-photo.html (http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2009/09/2-lapd-officers-place-on-leave-amid-probe-into-leak-of-rihanna-photo.html)).

Bossip Staff
2009a "Was Rihanna Dumb for Taking Breezy Back???" *Bossip.* (February 28; http://bossip.com/88405/was-rihanna-dumb-for-taking-breezy-back/ (http://bossip.com/88405/was-rihanna-dumb-for-taking-breezy-back/)).

Bossip Staff
2009b "Oprah Discusses Rih On Show & Rih Tweets "She Doesn't Know What's Best For Me." *Bossip.* (March 13; http://bossip.com/91812/real-talk-from-oprah-to-rihanna/#more-91812 (http://bossip.com/91812/real-talk-from-oprah-to-rihanna/#more-91812)).

Brown, Chris
2010 *Twitter*. (December 21; http://twitter.com/#!/chrisbrown/status/17286414970392576 (http://twitter.com/#!/chrisbrown/status/17286414970392576)).

Brown, DeNeen L. and Ashley Surdin
2009 "Chris Brown Pleads Guilty to Assault." *The Washington Post*. (June 23, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/22/AR2009062200452.html?wprss=rss_print/style (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/22/AR2009062200452.html?wprss=rss_print/style)).

brownfemipower
2010 "Eminem/Rihanna." *flip flopping joy*. (August 6; http://flipfloppingjoy.com/2010/08/06/eminemrihanna/ (http://flipfloppingjoy.com/2010/08/06/eminemrihanna/)).

Chen, Ching-In, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha, eds
2011 *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities.* Boston: South End Press.

Clark-Flory, Tracy
2010 "Megan Fox sexes up domestic violence in Eminem's video." Salon. (August 6; http://www.salon.com/2010/08/06/megan_fox_eminem_rihanna/ (http://www.salon.com/2010/08/06/megan_fox_eminem_rihanna/)).

Cliff, Michelle
1990 "Object into Subject: Some Thoughts on the Work of Black Women's Artists." *Making Face, making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute. pp. 271-290.

Cook, Rhonda
2010 "2 officers out of jobs in wake of repeated Tasering of woman." *ajc*. (July 13; http://www.ajc.com/news/2-officers-out-of-568967.html (http://www.ajc.com/news/2-officers-out-of-568967.html)).

Facebook Page
2010 "If Rihanna is so hard, why didn't she knock Chris Brown out?" *Facebook*. (February 13; https://www.facebook.com/pages/If-Rihanna-is-so-hard-why-didnt-she-knock-Chris-Brown-out/353426460328?sk=wall (https://www.facebook.com/pages/If-Rihanna-is-so-hard-why-didnt-she-knock-Chris-Brown-out/353426460328?sk=wall)).

Facebook Page Search
2011 *Facebook.* (Search completed by author on October 1; https://www.facebook.com/search.php?q=rihanna%20chris%20brown&init=quick&tas=0.3224312108941376 (https://www.facebook.com/search.php?q=rihanna%20chris%20brown&init=quick&tas=0.3224312108941376)).

Fauntleroy II, James, Brian Kennedy, Robyn Rihanna Fenty
2009 "Fire Bomb." [Recorded by Rihanna.] On *Rated R* [CD]. New York, NY: Def Jam Recordings.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks
1993 *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hilton, Perez
2009a "Why Are People Still Supporting This Monster?" *PerezHilton.com*. (March 7; http://perezhilton.com/?p=46752&cp=6 (http://perezhilton.com/?p=46752&cp=6)).

Hilton, Perez
2009b "Rihanna Trying To Get Out Of Testifying!" *PerezHilton.com.* (March 13; http://perezhilton.com/2009-03-13-rihanna-trying-to-get-out-of-testifying#.TpJobd6ImU8 (http://perezhilton.com/2009-03-13-rihanna-trying-to-get-out-of-testifying#.TpJobd6ImU8)).

Hilton, Perez
2009c "Rihanna Underwhelms With New "Comeback" Single!" PerezHilton.com. (October 20; http://perezhilton.com/2009-10-20-rihanna-underwhelms-with-new-comeback-single#.TpPKcd6ImU8 (http://perezhilton.com/2009-10-20-rihanna-underwhelms-with-new-comeback-single#.TpPKcd6ImU8)).

hilzoy
2009a "Why Do They Stay?" *Obsidian Wings*. (April 10; http://obsidianwings.blogs.com/obsidian_wings/2009/04/why-do-they-stay.html (http://obsidianwings.blogs.com/obsidian_wings/2009/04/why-do-they-stay.html)).

hilzoy
2009b "Battered Women: The Sequel." *Obsidian Wings*. (April 13;
http://obsidianwings.blogs.com/obsidian_wings/2009/04/battered-women-the-sequel.html
(http://obsidianwings.blogs.com/obsidian_wings/2009/04/battered-women-the-sequel.html)).

Hirshman, Linda
2009a "Crazy Love, Crazy Choices." *Slate*. (April 8;
http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/xxfactor_xxtra/2009/04/crazy_love_crazy_choices.html
(http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/xxfactor_xxtra/2009/04/crazy_love_crazy_choices.html)).

Hirshman, Linda
2009b "Sheltering Women: Linda Hirshman Responds to Hilzoy." *Slate.* (April 14;
http://bbs.slate.com/blogs/blogs/xxfactor/archive/2009/04/14/sheltering-women-linda-hirshman-responds-to-hilzoy.aspx
(http://bbs.slate.com/blogs/blogs/xxfactor/archive/2009/04/14/sheltering-women-linda-hirshman-responds-to-hilzoy.aspx)).

Kaufman, Gil
2010 "Eminem And Kim's Rocky Past Inspired 'Love The Way You Lie' Video." *MTV*. (August 5;
http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1645202/eminem-kims-rocky-past-inspired-love-way-lie-video.jhtml
(http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1645202/eminem-kims-rocky-past-inspired-love-way-lie-video.jhtml)).

Leonard, Elizabeth
2009 "Rihanna and Chris Brown Are Back Together." *People*. (February 27;
http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20262240,00.html (http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20262240,00.html)).

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence
2003 "Community Accountability Working Document Principles/Concerns/Strategies/Models." *INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence*. (http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=93 (http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=93)).

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence Ad-Hoc Community Accountability Working Group
2005 "Community Accountability Within the People of Color Progressive Movement." *INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence*.
(http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/2406_cmty-acc-poc.pdf (http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/2406_cmty-acc-poc.pdf)).

Marcotte, Amanda
2009 "Putting yourself in someone's shoes." *Pandagon*. (March;
http://pandagon.net/index.php/site/comments/putting_yourself_in_someones_shoes
(http://pandagon.net/index.php/site/comments/putting_yourself_in_someones_shoes)).

Mathers, Marshall, Alexander Grant, and Holly Hafermann
2010 "Love the Way You Lie." [Recorded by Eminem, featuring Rihanna.] On *Recovery* [CD]. Ferndale, MI: Effigy Studios.

Michaels, Lorne (Executive Producer)
2011 Saturday Night Live (television series). New York: National Broadcasting Company.

Morrison, Toni
1992 *Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Morrissey, Tracie Egan
2010 "Chris Brown Doesn't Regret Showing Off Domestic Violence Certificate." *Jezebel*. (December 21;
http://jezebel.com/5715838/chris-brown-doesnt-regret-showing-off-domestic-violence-certificate
(http://jezebel.com/5715838/chris-brown-doesnt-regret-showing-off-domestic-violence-certificate)).

Nash, Terius, Christopher Stewart, Robyn Rihanna Fenty, and Jay Jenkins
2009 "Hard." [Recorded by Rihanna.] On *Rated R* [CD]. Paris, France: Def Jam Recordings.

Natasha
2009 "NCFM: Rihanna Needs To Come Clean About Her Violence Too!" *The YBF*. (November 5;
http://theybf.com/2009/11/05/ncfm-rihanna-needs-come-clean-about-her-violence-too (http://theybf.com/2009/11/05/ncfm-rihanna-needs-come-clean-about-her-violence-too)).

National Coalition for Men
2009 "NCFM News Release calling on fair coverage of Rihanna/Brown." *NCFM Recent Activities*. (November 5; http://ncfm-activities.blogspot.com/2009/11/ncfm-news-release-calling-on-fair.html (http://ncfm-activities.blogspot.com/2009/11/ncfm-news-release-calling-on-fair.html)).

Ne-Yo, Chuck Harmony
2009 "Russian Roulette." [Recorded by Rihanna.] On *Rated R* [CD]. New York City, NY: Roc the Mic Studios.

North, Anna
2009a "Does Rihanna's New Single Defend Abusive Relationships?" *Jezebel*. (October 20; http://jezebel.com/5385977/does-rihannas-new-single-defend-abusive-relationships (http://jezebel.com/5385977/does-rihannas-new-single-defend-abusive-relationships)).

North, Anna
2009b "Rihanna On Chris Brown: "I Fell In Love With That Person — That's Embarrassing."" *Jezebel.* (November 5; http://jezebel.com/5397763/rihanna-on-chris-brown-i-fell-in-love-with-that-person—thats-embarrassing (http://jezebel.com/5397763/rihanna-on-chris-brown-i-fell-in-love-with-that-person---thats-embarrassing)).

North, Anna
2009c "Rihanna's Interview, Part Two: "[Chris] Had No Soul In His Eyes." *Jezebel*. (November 6; http://jezebel.com/5398634/rihannas-interview-part-two-[chris]-had-no-soul-in-his-eyes (http://jezebel.com/5398634/rihannas-interview-part-two-%5bchris%5d-had-no-soul-in-his-eyes)).

Nuñez, Kismet
2011 "In the Future, We Kill Our Attackers: Rihanna's "Man Down" as Afrofuturist Text." (June 9; http://nunezdaughter.wordpress.com/2011/06/09/in-the-future-we-kill-our-attackers-rihannas-man-down-as-afrofuturistic-text/ (http://nunezdaughter.wordpress.com/2011/06/09/in-the-future-we-kill-our-attackers-rihannas-man-down-as-afrofuturistic-text/)).

Pates, Alex and Ansheera Ace Hilliard
2009 "Beyond Chris Brown and Rihanna." *Chicago Tribune*. (February 24; http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/race/2009/02/beyond-chris-brown-and-rihanna.html (http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/race/2009/02/beyond-chris-brown-and-rihanna.html)).

PopularMusicWorld
2009a "Rihanna Interview on ABC, 20/20 (Part 1)." *Youtube*. (November 8; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjV8PWdZYR0&feature=related (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjV8PWdZYR0&feature=related)).

PopularMusicWorld
2009b "Rihanna Interview on ABC, 20/20 (Part 2)." *Youtube*. (November 8; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJgQ8aN1-pM&feature=related (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJgQ8aN1-pM&feature=related)).

PopularMusicWorld
2009c "Rihanna Interview on ABC, 20/20 (Part 3)." *Youtube*. (November 8; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xC0nLGLpnQY&feature=related (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xC0nLGLpnQY&feature=related)). [EDITED June 20, 2012: This link has since been edited, so parts of the interview are no longer part of the video. I've linked the above references to this video to this alternative version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziShNfBtURo (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziShNfBtURo)]

Richie, Beth
1995 *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered, Black Women*. New York: Routledge.

Rihanna
2011 *Twitter*. (June 2; http://twitter.com/#!/rihanna/status/76330693042520064 (http://twitter.com/#!/rihanna/status/76330693042520064)).

Rojas, Clarissa, Alisa Bierria, and Mimi Kim
2011 *Social Justice Journal, Special Issue: Reimagining Community Accountability in Theory and Practice*.

Rolling Stone
2011 "Rihanna Opens Up Like Never Before in Rolling Stone Cover Story." *Rolling Stone*. (March 30; http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/rihanna-opens-up-like-never-before-in-rolling-stone-cover-story-20110330

(http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/rihanna-opens-up-like-never-before-in-rolling-stone-cover-story-20110330)).

Rushe, Dominic
2011 "Strauss-Kahn case maid sues New York Post over prostitute allegation." *theguardian*. (July 5; http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/05/strauss-kahn-maid-new-york-post?INTCMP=SRCH (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/05/strauss-kahn-maid-new-york-post?INTCMP=SRCH)).

Smith, Hortense
2009 "Rihanna And Chris Brown: What Happens Now?" *Jezebel*. (February 28; http://jezebel.com/5162004/rihanna-and-chris-brown-what-happens-now (http://jezebel.com/5162004/rihanna-and-chris-brown-what-happens-now)).

Smooth, Jay
2009 "Beyond Chris Brown and Rihanna." *Ill Doctrine*. (February 14; http://www.illdoctrine.com/2009/02/beyond_chris_brown_and_rihanna.html (http://www.illdoctrine.com/2009/02/beyond_chris_brown_and_rihanna.html)).

Tami
2009 "For black women, hatred begins at 'home'." *What Tami Said*. (February 10; http://www.whattamisaid.com/2009/02/for-black-women-hatred-begins-at-home.html (http://www.whattamisaid.com/2009/02/for-black-women-hatred-begins-at-home.html)).

The Urban Daily
2009 "Men's Group Wants Rihanna To "Woman-Up" On Hitting Brown." *The Urban Daily.* (November 8; http://theurbandaily.com/gossip-news/the-urban-daily-staff/mens-group-wants-rihanna-to-woman-up-on-hitting-brown/ (http://theurbandaily.com/gossip-news/the-urban-daily-staff/mens-group-wants-rihanna-to-woman-up-on-hitting-brown/)).

TMZ Staff
2009 "Rihanna — The Face of a Battered Woman." *TMZ*. (February 22; http://www.tmz.com/2009/02/22/rihanna-photo-face-beating/#.TpKs3d6ImU8 (http://www.tmz.com/2009/02/22/rihanna-photo-face-beating/#.TpKs3d6ImU8)).

Turner, Tina and Kurt Loder
1986 *I, Tina*. New York: Avon Books.

Wheeler, Katrina
2009 "Rihanna's endorsements reportedly in danger; Gucci ad may not be renewed." *examiner.com*. (March 14; http://www.examiner.com/pop-media-in-national/rihanna-s-endorsements-reportedly-danger-gucci-ad-may-not-be-renewed-watch-video-documentary (http://www.examiner.com/pop-media-in-national/rihanna-s-endorsements-reportedly-danger-gucci-ad-may-not-be-renewed-watch-video-documentary)).

YBF
2010 "Chris Brown Is A Graduate…Of Domestic Violence Classes." *The YBF*. (December 20; http://theybf.com/2010/12/20/chris-brown-is-a-graduateof-domestic-violence-classes?page=3 (http://theybf.com/2010/12/20/chris-brown-is-a-graduateof-domestic-violence-classes?page=3)).

Yursik, Patrice Elizabeth Grell (bella)
2009 "As An "Island Woman…"" *Afrobella.* (February 9; http://www.afrobella.com/2009/02/09/as-an-island-woman/ (http://www.afrobella.com/2009/02/09/as-an-island-woman/)).

2 responses to "*Rihanna, Accountability, & Survivor Subjectivity*"

1. Pingback: Top 5 Motown Singles: 1968 — The Curvature
2. Pingback: Prison Culture » I Don't Want to Write Another Word About Chris Brown…

Blog at WordPress.com. Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information